MEMORIAL

OF THE

JOURNEYMEN BOOKBINDERS

OF

WASHINGTON, D. C.,

TO THE CONGRESS OF THE UNITED STATES AGAINST THE RECOMMENDATION OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON PRINTING TO REDUCE THE WAGES OF THE EMPLOYEES OF THE GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE AND BINDERY TO THE AVERAGE PRICE PAID PER HOUR FOR THE SAME WORK, OR PIECE WORK, IN THE CITIES OF BALTIMORE, PHILADELPHIA AND NEW YORK.

To the Members of the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled:

GENTLEMEN: In the report submitted to the House of Representatives, Friday, May 12, by the majority of the House Committee on Printing, they recommend that the House Committee on Appropriations be instructed to embody in the sundry civil bill provisions recommending a radical change in the law now governing the Public Printer, and further regulating the administration of affairs in that department of the Government. One section of the act to be submitted to the consideration of the Committee on Civil Sundry Appropriations provides "that from and after the passage of this act it shall be the duty of the Government Printer to pay no greater price for labor performed by printers, bookbinders and other employees in the Government Printing Office, for each hour's work or piece work, than the average price paid for an hour's work for piece work of the same description in the cities of New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore."

In view of the circumstances which have induced the House Committee on Printing to recommend the enactment of a law providing for a change in the present law governing the Government Printing Office,

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and providing for a reduction of the present rates of wages paid in the printing and binding departments to the scale of prices paid in the printing offices and binderies in the cities of New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore, we respectfully ask that the following protest to the proposed reduction may receive your due consideration and approval.

After a careful review of the report of the House Committee on Printing, we find that especial attention is directed to the inauguration of a system of economy in the management of that department, over which they have, to a certain extent, supervision. To this feature of the report we do not presume to offer any objection, as we fully appreciate and recognize the wisdom of that policy which looks to a just, proper and consistent retrenchment in the administration of the financial and business affairs of the Government; but when a system of legislation is proposed which necessarily operates to the injury of the working class, and subjects labor to the unreasonable demands of capitalists and monopolists, it then becomes a subject of vital importance to your memorialists, who constitute a part of that useful element of society.

In the report of the Committee on Printing you will perceive that the necessity of recommending this reduction in the present rates of wages is based upon the statement that the Government is paying extravagant prices for printing and binding material and labor, which is claimed to be from 30 to 125 per cent. in excess of market rates, or prices paid for labor and material in cities herein mentioned.

The question as to the price paid by the Public Printer for material it is not our intention to take under consideration; that is a matter which belongs exclusively to that official, whom, we presume, is ready and willing, when the opportunity is afforded him, to answer. We feel, however, that we should be direlect in our duty to ourselves and those depending upon our labor for a support not to submit a respectful protest against that unjust policy of political economy which, if carried out, must operate to the serious injury, financially and pecuniarily, of a large, intelligent, respectable and industrious class of Government employees. It has been truly said, "That there is *but one consideration* that would justify a reduction of the prices of wages, and that is a corresponding reduction in the cost of living." The wages we are now receiving only correspond with the cost of living in Washington. Our pay is simply fifty cents per hour, or $4 per day; this corresponds with the wages paid to the printers. It may not be out of place to state, in this connection, that we are not the recipients of the same privileges and immunities granted to the clerical force employed in other departments of the Government. We have no thirty days' leave of absence, with pay; on the contrary, every hour we lose, through sickness or by furlough, is charged against us. We do not make mention

of this fact by way of complaint, but merely to disabuse the minds of those who labor under the impression that we are the recipients of a fixed salary. As reference has been made to the eight-hour law, it may be proper to make mention of the fact that, since the organization of the Congressional Printing Office, all the employees of the Government Bindery, doing regular work, have had a stipulated amount to do per day, said amount being fixed at the rate paid for the same number of books under the contract system. On the adoption of the eight-hour law, they voluntarily agreed to execute the same amount under the new law that they did during the existence of the ten-hour system, and have continued to do so up to the present time. To the correctness of this statement the foreman of the bindery can testify, if called upon.

The following extract from a former report of Senator Anthony, chairman of the Senate Committee on Printing, to which we call your attention, will demonstrate the fact that under the present law governing the Congressional Printer, the work is executed in a better style and at less cost to the Government than under the contract system, the restoration of which the majority of the House Committee on Printing recommend. Senator Anthony says:

"The testimony of the Treasury Department is that the printing and binding that was formerly executed by contract, and that is now executed at the Government Printing Office, is 50 per cent. better in quality, and about 25 per cent. cheaper in price, than when it was executed under the old system. The contract system was abandoned, and the work was transferred to the Government Printing Office on account of the extravagance and frauds under the former. The contract system, which is the fairest in theory, is susceptible of enormous frauds when applied to mechanical work and to work of an indefinite character. Besides the cheapness and superior excellence of the work, as at present executed, there is great advantage in the uniformity of the blanks and blank books. This uniformity adds to the authenticity and responsibility of the returns of officials, and diminishes clerical labor at the departments."

Thus the change in the law, so far as they are concerned, has been, in reality, a gain to the Government, in saving a considerable expenditure of money for fuel and gas, as well as in the wear and tear of machinery. This may appear, at the first glance, of little consequence, but when we figure up the amount saved in this branch of the Government Printing Office, during the winter months, it constitutes an item of some importance in the economy of fuel and gas.

We further protest against the recommendation of the Committee on Printing, for the reason that under the present scale of prices, we are but receiving a fair and reasonable compensation for the labor we perform.

If you will carefully examine the market reports of the necessaries of life, as reported in the leading commercial journals in Washington, Baltimore, Philadelphia and New York, you will find the price of produce in Washington much higher than the cost of the same articles of consumption in the other cities herein mentioned. This being true, you can readily perceive that the wages now paid are not more than sufficient to enable us to meet the necessary expenses of every day life. That the cost of living here is in the excess of cities north and east, is clearly demonstrated in the fact that many of the employees of the various departments of the Government find it more economical to live in Baltimore, notwithstanding the expense of traveling back and forth, than to live in Washington.

While directing your attention to this important question, which deserves your earnest consideration, we embody in our memorial the following article on the "cost of living," copied from a leading commercial paper in Baltimore, of Tuesday, March the 21st, 1876.

"The wholesale 'slashing' of the salaries of the Federal office-holders by the House of Representatives, suggests an inquiry as to whether there has been a decrease in the cost of living that will enable those who have been deprived of fifteen per cent. of their income to adjust their household expenses to the new schedule of wages. A very large majority of the people who work for a living, whether with their hands or their brains, barely manage to keep out of debt. The reductions, proposed by the House Committee on Appropriations, will be equivalent to the loss of one day's wages each week, as compared with present rates. Has there been a reduction in the prices of the necessaries of life that will permit the class affected by the pending appropriation bill to retain their situations without totally changing their habits of life?

"Not being familiar with Washington prices, we shall consider the matter as if the contemplated reduction of fifteen per cent. applied to the clerks, the school teachers and the preachers of Baltimore city. Such of them as now receive $1,500 per annum would, under the new schedule, get $1,275; those that get $1,200 would be cut down to $1,020, and those that now manage to make both ends meet on $1,000 a year would have to be content with $850. It must be understood that these people cannot live in the narrow streets and cheap houses in which the poorer classes dwell in apparent unconsciousness of the squalid surroundings. They are mostly persons of genteel tastes and good education. Many of them have grown up in cultivated and even luxurious homes, and would revolt at the very suggestion of a tenement house as a fit place of abode. Yet, between them and the cheap quarters tenanted by the poor, there is but a narrow border land, spanned by a salary that probably exceeds the actual cost of living under the

cheapest possible conditions by $200, or perhaps $300. Take this margin away, and they would be obliged to make a public confession of poverty by making no further attempt 'to keep up appearances.'

"There is but one consideration, therefore, that would justify a reduction of salaries, namely, a corresponding reduction in the cost of living. If we cut off the proceeds of one day's labor in every week, while the necessary expenses of the clerk and his family remain as before, we break down the thin wall of partition between competence and poverty. Has there been any perceptible decline in the price of the staple articles of household consumption from the rates that ruled in 1873, when there was no thought of cutting down wages? Is there any man living in a respectable neighborhood in the city of Baltimore who pays fifteen per cent. less to his landlord than he did in 1873? Flour is something cheaper by the barrel, but inasmuch as the great majority of housekeepers buy their bread from the baker, a reduction of one dollar per barrel in the price makes no difference, as a loaf of bread costs as much now as it did then. Certainly there has been no reduction in the price of meats and poultry. Potatoes are cheap, but they are never dear, and the same may be said of turnips and cabbage. Apples are unusually high, and all canned vegetables sell at the usual prices. We do not think that there is a housekeeper in the city that finds his 'marketing' expenses less than in 1873. We believe that coal and wood are higher now than they were then.

"In the matter of clothing there has been probably a small reduction in price, but not enough to make any appreciable difference in the annual outlay. Ready made suits for men are sold for less than they were in 1873, but the merchant tailors have not made any large reduction either in fine or common clothing. Upon the whole we believe that a man who gets a salary of $1,000 or $1,200 a year is obliged to use as much economy now, in order to keep his family expenses within his income, as he did in 1873. Should he quit housekeeping and go to boarding it will require $600 a year to pay for the subsistence of himself and wife at the cheapest boarding house that can be found in a respectable neighborhood. If he has three children his boarding bill will be $1,000 per annum, and provided his salary is only that much he will have nothing left to buy clothing. From these figures it is easy to see how a reduction of fifteen per cent. in salaries in Baltimore would drive a large number of intelligent, genteel people into poverty.

"Will not the proposed reduction in the pay of the Department clerks at Washington have the same effect as if they lived in Baltimore? We are aware that the bill reported by the House Committee on Appropriations does not apply to salaries below $1,200; but the difference in the cost of living in the two cities makes a salary of $1,000 in Baltimore more than equal to a salary of $1,300 in Washington.

Rents are cheaper here, and there is so much difference in the price of nearly every article of food that many Washingtonians find it profitable to pay the railroad fare between the two cities and attend the Baltimore markets. It seems to us that the effect of a reduction of fifteen per cent. in the salaries of Government officers will drive all the *married* men out of the departments."

We do not consider it necessary to enter further into a statement as to the difference in the cost of living in Washington and other cities, to which your attention has been directed, as you have, doubtless, had ample means of informing yourselves by personal experience. We desire, however, to bear testimony to the truthfulness of the forcible arguments presented in opposition to the reduction of the salaries of the clerical force of the Departments of the Government, and, to say that the same objections to the reduction of the pay of clerks is equally applicable to the employees of every department of the Government, without distinction as to their calling or occupation.

With all due deference to the recommendations of the House Committee on Printing, we do not consider the proposition to regulate the scale of prices by the average prices paid in New York, Philadelphia and Baltimore *correct in principle*, as the spirit of unfair competition caused by the employment of unskilled labor in the trade in those cities, and the consequent low wages paid for such work, would give an average unfair and entirely too low. Skilled workmen in New York receive higher rates of pay than that paid in the Government book bindery.

Notwithstanding the efforts of corn exchanges, coal exchanges, trade unions and other associations of like character, to affix what they consider a remunerative price for their commodities or their labor, yet the law of supply and demand, under our present system of trade and legislation, does ultimately fix or regulate the price of labor and its products. But, although the experience of the past teaches us that certain effects follow *certain causes under certain circumstances*, the legislation of the past, based upon the theory that labor was a mere marketable commodity, being entirely in the interest of capital, was the primary circumstance causing the resulting dependence of the laborer upon the state of the market for his rate of pay, we respectfully submit that it does not follow, therefore, that those circumstances are inflexible or unchangeable; and we had hoped when Congress adopted the law known as the eight-hour law, that a brighter day was dawning for the laborer; that in the fullness of the light of that day he would not be placed in the market of his country, upon the same level with the products of his skill or industry; that in the legislation of the future, statesmen would recognize workingmen as something more than machines, having higher aspiration and higher duties to themselves and

their country than the daily one of ministering to the wants and pleasures of the moneyed class of society; that expedients would be devised, upon the granting of charters or special privileges to corporations or capitalists, to secure to the laborer, under such franchise, a fair share of the profits of his industry. That their hopes may not be disappointed, your memorialists earnestly pray.

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